

# Appropriations Public Hearing Day

## Tuesday February 21, 2017

Dear Honorable Members of Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee, Senators Osten and Formica and Representative Walker,

My name is Theresa Velendzas and I am from Glastonbury. I have a son who attends GEHMS in Glastonbury, which is part of the CREC magnet school system. My daughter also attended this school and has since transferred to the local town school. As a parent with children in both school systems I am here today to ask you to please support the continued funding for our magnet schools.

First, let me thank you for your past support for funding for magnet schools in Connecticut. My child benefits greatly through the extraordinary opportunity he experiences every day at GEHMS. The opportunity that the magnet school offers for my son to get more sciences has had a profound effect on him. He really enjoys going to school and has excelled because of it.

Additionally, I know that my son learns better and is more prepared for the real world as a result of working alongside other students from different backgrounds. This is something that was also very important to us when we opted into the magnet school system. We are Greek American and feel very strongly about the importance of exposure to other cultures.

My daughter attended the Magnet school for a few years and asked to move because she wanted to try both school systems. Her father and I analyzed both and concluded that we would let each child choose where they would like to go. We decided it was an important facet in learning.

My daughter's first year was great because she had a great teacher. However the antiquated building she is in made going to school miserable during the hot spring and fall months. She addressed the town council at a budget meeting, to request support for building upgrades for air conditioning. Her argument was simple: "If you think it's important to put heat on in the winter so we can learn better, then why would you not make sure we have fresh air in the hotter months when my classroom is 105 degrees?"

After a vote to conduct a needs assessment for the Glastonbury Schools, the funds to perform the upgrades were taken off the table. The Glastonbury school system is fulfilling an unfunded mandate with continuous budget cuts. My daughter's favorite activities are being slashed. Now leaving is not an option unless we move.

It is worth noting that I strongly believe her experience in the Magnet School gave her the inspiration and the insight to be the only 8 year old standing at a podium, unassisted, before a board in a public hearing. My daughter was inspired, just as my son is, to excel and explore her strengths. I will forever be grateful to GEHMS for that.

The situation does not look good for our Public Schools or our Magnet Schools. They cannot fulfill mandates when they are unfunded. They also cannot rely entirely on community goodwill. As a parent I have spent countless hours supporting the Magnet School's programs to ensure facets that were previously funded or that we should be able to get financial support for. We do a lot as volunteers. As a

State I believe it is imperative that we support our existing schools and provide the tools for them to succeed. I see first hand how schools are expected to do more and more with less. As adults we can manage creatively to an extent but that extent has been stretched thin and children run the risk of suffering consequences as a result. Please make school funding a non-negotiable item.

My son is a better reader because he reads and writes reports about science. He is recognized as "Scientist of The Week" for science projects he does independently and even got to present his project to students 2 grades above him. That's what a Magnet School offers; an opportunity for children to thrive in education by using a strong subject as a vehicle for learning.

In these tight budget times, our magnet schools are at risk. Without sustainable funding, CREC which operates seventeen of these innovative schools, will be forced to either cut programming or to increase the costs they charge to local school districts already suffering their own unfunded crises.

I am asking the legislature to follow through on its promise to invest in the future of *all* students. Magnet schools have a successful track record of closing the achievement gap and providing all students a chance not only to succeed but also to thrive. Currently the State Board is considering adding more Charter Schools. Before you add any more schools, please adequately fund those that you have established and that are thriving. I urge you to continue funding the schools that are already operating and available and have demonstrated success before you consider funding new school choice options.

Thank you for reading my letter. Please reply and share with me how you will ensure that my child's school's funding will remain in place. I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Sincerely,

Theresa Velendzas  
TVelendzas@sbcglobal.net  
91 Grandview Drive  
Glastonbury CT  
(860) 478-7430